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Saturday, Sept 7, 1989

(Nightthoughts)

What was learned from the Cuban Missile crisis,

--by the military: about the likelihood, and the dangers, of civilian officials imposing detailed, real-time civilian control of operations?

--by the military: likewise, for highest-level (Pres, SecDef, JCS) control: i.e., centralization of operations.

The latter issue also arose in Cuba I (see Bissel's comments to me in 1964--relating, I think, to Cuba II).

Parallels: the effort to "set the stage" (literally, in theatrical terms) for public acceptance of US invasion, recognized secretly by top officials as essential to the achievement of "US" (their own, secret) interests and objectives, by means of a combination of provocative external raids and internal sabotage and assassinations/kidnappings with US ships and planes inside enemy waters and airspace:

--Cuba I

--Guatemala? (friendly army)

--Cuba II

--Vietnam, 1961 (flood relief: friendly army)

--Vietnam, 1962-63: strategic hamlet program, advisors, air

--Vietnam, 1964-65: 34A, de Soto patrols

--Nicaragua, 1981-89: contras, Honduran bases, air supply and recon, mining and sabotage by UCLA's.

Analysts of Cuba II rarely address what were the main controversies and internal "lessons" and concerns derived from Cuba II:

--Civil-military relations

--Centralized high-level control

--Need for US troops, to achieve "minimum acceptable objectives" from the point of view of the military;

Overthrow of Castro

In VN: really, the overthrow of the Hanoi regime! The real objective of bombing and invasion of NVN, from the point of view of JCS: the only way, as they saw it, to achieve an "independent, pro-US regime" securely in any part of VN!

--This conflicted, from the point of view of high civilians, with the desire to avoid combat confrontation with either China or the SU:

as in Korea!

This analogy, a lesson learned especially by Democrats (LBJ), impressed civilians more than military, who were willing to see direct conflict with China "if necessary." (Rusk: nuclears would be used).

Yet, unless this risk were faced, could NVN really be restrained from threatening or attacking SVN overwhelmingly?

JFK really did hold back, reject military advice on the "minimum necessary US involvement" (and lie to public about it) in:

Laos

Vietnam, 1961 (I discovered)

Cuba I

Cuba II (reply to recon shootdown; real willingness to invade or attack missiles, vs. trade; "guarantee" to Castro)

Mongoose (failure to endorse need for invasion).

Even though his willingness to threaten, and to contemplate, discuss and plan possible US attack went further, in each case, than the public knew (which "excited" the military, teased them, eventually frustrated them).

(What about Berlin? DomRep?)

Military had had similar experience with Eisenhower, over Indochina, and Quemoy; perhaps, Korea.